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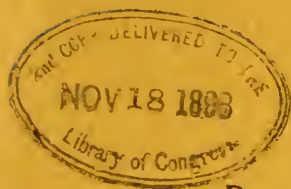


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THE "NEUTRAL GROUND"

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THE "NEUTRAL GROUND."

By CHARLES PRYER.

DURING the War of the Revolution the County of Westchester, and particularly the lower towns (now forming the Borough of Bronx or Bronck's'), was the prey of the foraging parties of both armies, as it lay directly between them and was permanently occupied by neither. Being common property to both parties, it was, therefore, called the "Neutral Ground." The views of the inhabitants themselves at the outset of the struggle were much divided, and if popular sentiment was not absolutely loyal to the crown of Great Britain, it was much more conservative than in New England or in the southern colonies.

Many of the leading families were staunch loyalists and afterwards prominent leaders of the Royalist Refugees. Amongst these were the Van Courtlandts, DeLanceys, Philipses, and

Location
of the
"Neutral
Ground"

410	The "Neutral Ground"
Views of its In- habitants	Wilkinsons, and these were the names which the people of that period were accustomed to follow. On the other side, however, were the Morrisses, Livingstons, and Tomkynses, families who belonged in the same region, so that parties may be said to have been pretty evenly divided. The first meetings called to consider the question of electing delegates to Congress were broken up by the violent efforts of Philipse, Wilkins, and other Royalists, and when the matter was finally decided in the affirmative, the delegates chosen were instructed to do nothing disloyal to "the government of his Majesty the King," and it is an historic fact that New York was the last colony to authorize its delegates in the Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of Independence. This conservatism, however, was not altogether induced by loyalty to the British government, but by a selfish interest. It was perfectly self-evident to such men as "Squire" Van Cortlandt, Oliver de Lancey, and others, that one of the main objects of the home government, in case of war, would be to separate the more southern from the New England colonies, and New York was the keystone of this position. With her deep harbor, and the broad Hudson stretching far to the northward, it would be easy for England to bring in her invincible fleet, and with it materially aid any army that might invade

the State from loyal Canada ; so what they feared, and what actually came to pass, was that the locality would be made the theatre of war and devastation.

But let us follow events more in detail. Boston had been evacuated, and the brothers Howe had sailed from Halifax ; already rumors were current that the General had been largely re-enforced, and that My Lord the Admiral had taken his entire command on board his magnificent and irresistible fleet, and was on his way to capture New York. Washington was even now in the city to defend it with the Continental army. On June 28, 1776, the British fleet appeared, and General Howe's troops were landed upon Staten Island without opposition. Washington had entirely too much ground to cover with his meagre force of eighteen thousand men, a large proportion being raw troops, and he found it impossible to defend that comparatively distant point.

It will be necessary here, to understand the campaign in the Neutral Ground, to give a short sketch of the capture of New York and Brooklyn Heights. It is now conceded that Washington made a mistake in attempting to defend New York with the very limited resources then at his command, but he was urged to do so both by the inhabitants and by Congress, and his own good judgment was entirely outweighed. Howe lost much

Landing
of the
British
Troops
upon
Staten
Island

Capture of
Brooklyn
Heights

time in vain attempts to negotiate a peace with the exasperated colonies. It may be here said to his credit, that he always carried the olive-branch with the sword, and fought with the greatest reluctance, so it was not until August 22, that he landed at Graves End, with twenty thousand men, his army in the interim having been augmented by the arrival of Sir Henry Clinton from the South. To oppose this force the Americans had nine thousand men under General Putnam. Most of these were behind earthworks on Brooklyn Heights, and on a wooded ridge commanding some of the roads from Graves End.

Howe spent several days in reconnoitring, and it was not until August 27, that any serious advance was made ; then he sent his brother, the Admiral, to threaten the city with the fleet and to keep Washington occupied, while he attacked the forces under Putnam. Four roads led from his Graves End camp towards the Continental lines, one of which ran along the shore, which was defended by General Lord Sterling with his division. Against this renegade Scotch peer, Howe sent General Grant with his Highlanders. Two of the remaining three roads joined near the village of Flatbush, and crossed the ridge which was defended by General Sullivan ; and here advanced General Heister with his Hessians. The fourth was the Jamaica Road, along which the main

The "Neutral Ground"

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body of the army marched with Howe himself, Clinton, Percy, and Cornwallis at their head. Their object was to march by the ridge where Sullivan was stationed, and then to wheel near the village of Bedford in order to attack him on the flank and rear. In this movement Howe undoubtedly out-generaled Putnam; Sullivan was completely routed, with the loss (including those of Sterling's division) of about four hundred killed and wounded, and one thousand taken prisoners; among the latter was the General himself.

The troops of Sterling did much better fighting, and it was not until Sullivan was defeated, and the main army of Howe joined Grant, that the Maryland brigades gave ground. Even then they succeeded in gaining Putnam's main line without disorder. Howe's troops were now tired, and he did not advance at once against the works on Brooklyn Heights. Washington at first re-enforced Putnam, supposing an immediate assault would be made, but finding Howe was in no hurry to fight, and seemed rather inclined to lay siege to the position, he took advantage of a very dense fog on the night of August 29, evacuated the forts, and took his entire army over to the New York shore. This is one of the most masterly retreats in the face of a superior force on record, and if Howe had shown his ability in his flanking march on

Washington
Retreats
from
Brooklyn

Perilous
Position
of
Putnam's
Command

the night of the twenty-seventh, Washington more than equalled him by his brilliant retreat on the night of the twenty-ninth, or two days later. Washington, with the main body of the army, retired to Harlem Heights, where he established himself in a very strong position, leaving Putnam with four thousand men in the city proper.

In 1776, the city of New York did not extend beyond Chatham Street, and the Island was much narrower at that period, as several blocks have been filled in on both rivers since those days; thus the command in the town did not have so much territory to cover as might appear at first sight, but it was perfectly self-evident that, from the moment that Long Island was lost, the city could not be held, and that Putnam's stay would be short; his position was, indeed, extremely perilous, for could Howe get some troops up either river in his ships, to a point between the city and the Continental army, he could land them, cut off the four thousand under Putnam, and capture his entire command.

Howe, seeing all this, sent two ships up the Hudson to Bloomingdale, disembarked his army on the other side of the Island at Kip's Bay (near the foot of the present East 34th Street), and attempted to cut off Putnam's division; but the genial gentleman was too strong for the soldier. Mrs. Robert Murray,

understanding the condition of things thoroughly, and seeing Howe and his staff passing, invited the General and officers to lunch with her. A halt was immediately called, and the lunchparty commenced which saved the American cause one general officer and four thousand men; for while this entertainment was in progress Putnam marched his entire division northward and joined Washington.

Howe now had New York, but it was of very little use to him so long as Washington's army occupied a strong position extending from the mouth of "Harlem Creek" right across the Island to the Hudson. The British commander, however, had two alternatives besides a direct assault; he could pass between Forts Lee and Washington with his fleet, ascend the Hudson, and make the position of the Americans untenable by landing in their rear. But to do this he would have to stand the fire from the forts, which might do considerable damage to his men-of-war and transports. The East River, or Sound, was, however, entirely free from forts, and afforded him almost as good an opportunity of getting into the rear of the Americans as the Hudson; this alternative was therefore selected, and on October 12, 1776, Howe embarked the greater part of his army and sailed up the Sound or East River as far as Throg's Neck² (now a portion of Greater New York), where he landed,

General
Howe in
Possession
of New
York

The Fight
at Pel-
ham's
Neck

leaving Lord Percy to keep Washington occupied at Harlem. He hoped by this movement to get directly in the rear of the Continental army, and so force it either to surrender, or entirely to rout and scatter it; but the rebels had not been sleeping.

General Heath, with a force of several thousand men, had been sent to defend the causeway and tear down the bridges across Westchester Creek, so it would be impossible for Howe to gain the rear of the Americans without a fight. Howe did not care to advance through a marsh in the face of so strong a force, and delayed on the Neck six days, in which little but ineffective skirmishing was accomplished. At the end of this period he took to his boats again, proceeded northeast about three miles, landed his forces on Pell's Neck³ or Pelham Neck, (now Pelham Park), and advanced towards the Albany and Boston roads. Heath threw a couple of brigades in his way, and attempted to check his progress. For a time quite a spirited fight was the result; but the Americans were out-numbered and compelled to retire with a loss of about ten killed and forty wounded. Howe had at last succeeded in reaching the place he wanted, but it was too late for his purpose of capturing the Continental army; for the Americans had evacuated Manhattan Island, except Fort Washington, and were now comparatively

safe on Chatterton Heights, near the village of White Plains. For a few days Howe's army covered a wide field, and we hear of some of his troopers almost as far north as the Connecticut line. This, however, was probably done merely in search of forage, for he soon concentrated them on the Albany Road near the scene of the recent engagement.

It was a beautiful autumnal morning, October 23, 1776, that the greatest military pageant took place that the fair county of Westchester ever saw, at all events in the eighteenth century. Howe, preparatory to following Washington, drew up his entire army for review, along the road and on the meadows (very near the present boundary-line between the city, and the now much curtailed County of Westchester), then known as Pelham and Eastchester flats. Some ten thousand men took part in the ceremonies, and the effect must, indeed, have been inspiring and beautiful. The bright scarlet of the British regulars, contrasted well with the more sombre green of Knyphausen's Hessians, and with the background of the yellow sedge grass covered with sparkling frost. This was a fine picture by which, on that chill October morning, to impress the inhabitants with the invincible power of England's chivalry, and the politic commander had thought it wise to invite a few of the more distinguished proprietors of

The
"Great
Review"
of
General
Howe's
Army

The
"Great
Review"
of
General
Howe's
Army

loyal tendencies to witness the affair. There was the fiery Philipse, and the philanthropic colonist who is said to have sprung from the grand old House of "Kourlandt" (Cortlandt), to witness the glorious return of their sovereign's banner, and, while the bands played and the sun glistened upon the bright arms of the troops, this little band of officers and gentlemen rode along the lines and inspected the army. As the sun rose higher in the heavens the day became warm and genial with that Indian summer balminess, so common to our American autumn. By noon the party before alluded to, were glad to halt for refreshments under the golden shade of what, even then, must have been a group of grand old chestnuts. That lunch just before the march to White Plains has become historic, and the old resident can still point out the trees with pride to any visitor who may be passing that way. Let us hope, however, that the meal of these fine gentlemen was not spoiled by the presence of that rough old German, the Count von Knyphausen, who, though a dashing soldier and a brave man, was no courtier, and anything but a pleasant dining companion. All that is left of this gallant assembly, are the old trees that have defied all change in this change-loving land, and as recently as the beginning of the winter (1897-98) still stood, the only landmarks of those long-

departed days. But, old trees, you are not to stand here always. Though you may have seen the Indians of the seventeenth century; Washington, Howe, and Clinton, of the eighteenth; and all the celebrities of the nineteenth; yet those trunks of yours, sixteen feet in circumference though they be, are but hollow shells; the gales of two hundred winters have lopped many a fair limb, and ere the twentieth century shall grow old the squirrel will no longer play on your boughs, nor the frosts of autumn turn your leaves to gold !

In the fall of 1876, just a hundred years after the day of the "Great Review," two gentlemen were lunching under the same old trees. "The days of old" were discussed, and the historic spot examined in all its bearings; but after a time the conversation flagged, and they sat gazing up into the shady trees, whose leaves were fast turning into those brilliant hues with which the American forest-trees bid good-bye to summer, when the elder man turned to his companion and said: "Here is the pistol which my grandfather carried when with General Howe on the day of the 'Grand Review,' when they lunched under these trees just before the Battle of White Plains; now, as I want you to remember this occasion, I present you with the derringer as a memento of the anniversary of that parade." As they gazed upon this weapon of a former age, the

The
"Great
Review"
of
General
Howe's
Army

The
Skinners
and
Cowboys

nineteenth century seemed to fade into the Indian summer mist, and they could only see the scarlet of the British regulars and the green of their Hessian allies; the figures of the chivalric Cornwallis; the gallant but peace-loving Howe, and the rough old soldier, Knyphausen.

But to return to our narrative. The day after the "Grand Review" Howe went in pursuit of the Continental army and on October 28, stormed Chatterton Heights near White Plains, and forced Washington to retire to North Castle. He himself, however, did not go farther, but soon withdrew to the city proper, to rest and refresh his troops, evidently thinking he had done enough for one campaign.

We have now finished with the great armies of either party in the Neutral Ground, and must hereafter content ourselves with resting in their shadow, and try to keep the war spirit alive by cavalry raids, the robberies of the Skinners and Cowboys, and such expeditions as were sent out for foraging purposes. DeLancey's and Tarleton's cavalry scoured this part of the country in all directions, and Heath and others were scarcely less active. The Cowboys (ostensibly Royalists), and the Skinners on the American side, vied with each other in the atrocity of their acts; they respected neither friend nor foe, only caring whether their victims had anything of value.

After Howe had established himself securely in the city, and Washington was at distant North Castle, the British had to take Fort Washington, on the northern part of New York or Manhattan Island, to make their conquest complete. It would have been far wiser for the Continentals to have evacuated the stronghold, as it was evidently impossible to hold it in the face of such an army as was now in the city ; but General Greene, instead of doing this, reinforced the post against the advice of Washington. The result was as might have been foreseen, that the fort had to be, after a desperate struggle, surrendered, and the Americans lost just so many more of their best troops.

Now, at last, the island was free from armed rebels, and there was no regular force of the enemy for many miles north of it ; but a number of foraging bands or cavalry of both parties, were wandering through the country in all directions, and when these parties met there was apt to be more or less trouble.

The first, and probably most tragic of these affairs occurred very soon after the events just related, or in the early winter of 1776. A party of Americans belonging to the army of General Charles Lee, which was still posted in the northern part of the county, came south as far as Ward's house (which is within the district we have attempted to describe), bent

The
Surrender
of Fort
Wash-
ington

The
Shooting
of Captain
Campbell

upon forage. In this time-honored mansion they found much that was to their taste, and after a few bottles of their absent host's very good wine had circulated among them, the discipline of Captain Delavan relaxed, and the guards were allowed to join in the general merry-making. As night came on they became as reckless of their safety as though the country was in a state of profound peace, and they were enjoying themselves in the village inn.

But the American foragers were not left long to enjoy their carousal. As the night advanced one or two of the more sober ones heard the distant sound of horses' hoofs, and at once tried to arouse their stupefied and sleepy companions, but without much success, while the tramp of many hoofs grew nearer and nearer, as the troopers galloped over the frozen ground. The jingling of the sabres and the word of command proved that they were soldiers, and before even those who were able had time to attempt either to defend themselves or to escape, the house was surrounded, and Captain Campbell, who was in charge of the Royal Cavalry, (for such the horsemen proved to be), demanded the immediate surrender of the Americans. Delavan, seeing that resistance was hopeless in the existing condition of his men, immediately complied, and stepped forward to hand his sword to Campbell, when a

shot was fired⁴ by one of the half-inebriated soldiers, and Campbell fell dead at the feet of the man whom only a second before he had considered his prisoner.

The
Shooting
of Captain
Campbell

This irresponsible act was nothing less, of course, than murder, as the terms of surrender had actually been agreed to, and the captured party would in all probability have been treated by Campbell as simple prisoners of war. This breach of faith, however, changed the entire aspect of things. The vilest passions of the British soldiers were aroused, and the only man with sufficient authority to control them was dead before their eyes. The fact that his life-blood was treacherously shed, served to justify almost any crime that might be committed. It was hardly to be expected that they would take into consideration the intoxicated condition of the man, nor did they, but sprang forward, sabre in hand, and cut down the innocent and unfortunate Delavan first; then they rushed into the house and took the lives of all whom they met, or, as the old farmers used to say, "stuck them like so many pigs." Some of the victims jumped from the windows, and were killed by those who remained outside to watch for them; some tried to secrete themselves among barrels and rubbish in the cellar, but were found and hacked to pieces. Not more than a half-dozen in all escaped to tell the story of this fearful night of

The
Skinner's
Raid upon
an Old
Homes-
stead

the first year of the Republic. About twenty-five are known to have perished, and it would seem that Campbell was pretty well avenged.

There are other incidents of the time handed down which are not so tragic ; we must now turn to an event less bloody but somewhat more amusing. An old homestead, situated not far from the scene just narrated, had not been deserted as were most of the houses in the vicinity. During the long, cold winter the occupants lived in constant fear of those marauders who subsisted by plundering the inhabitants, under cover of the pretended espousal of one cause or the other, the Skinners being the Continental robbers, while the Cowboys claimed to be loyal to the King. They were both absolutely indifferent to the politics of the unfortunates whom they robbed.

It was in January, 1777 ; the night had set in cold and forbidding ; a keen northwest wind had been blowing all day, and as the sun sank into heavy banks of clouds, the thermometer^s almost touched the zero point. The snow creaked under the feet of the farmer as he returned to the house after attending to such cattle as the marauding parties had left him. Throwing his hat on a chair he remarked :

"I hope those Skinners will leave us alone to-night !"

The darkness increased, and as the night wore on, all that could be heard was the roar

of the wind, as it drove the still drifting snow against the window-panes ; but a crackling fire burned in the ample fireplace, and all within was genial and comfortable, when—hark ! between the gusts of the winter wind could be heard the distant tramp of many feet. The farmer jumps up and rushes to the door to listen,—*no* there is no mistake, nearer and nearer come those ominous sounds, and soon a party of some fifteen men or more, can be seen advancing like spectres of the night. In a few moments they reach the house and enter without invitation. With small ceremony, they make their business known, by demanding all the money and valuables to be handed over to them at once on pain of death.

All are armed with the military muskets of the period, and the majority carry pistols and knives in addition, but, they have no other insignia of regular soldiers about them except cartridge boxes, belts, etc. They are, for the most part, dressed in the ordinary clothing of the common people of the country, with here and there a stolen military garment, made conspicuous by its incongruity. To their demand the owner of the house replies that he has no money, and is therefore unable to give it to them. The intruders reiterate their threats of instant death unless they get what they desire ; but finding it useless to parley longer with the farmer, they leave a

The
-Skinners
Raid upon
an Old
Home—
stead

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The Skinners Raid upon an Old Home= stead	couple of their number to guard him and his family, and proceed to search the house for themselves. After an absence of about half an hour, during which time all the upper rooms are thoroughly ransacked, the party return with very little booty and again threaten the unfortunate proprietor, who can only tell them just what he did before, that he has nothing to satisfy them; which answer is in all probability perfectly true, as previous visitors of the same kind had helped themselves to everything worth carrying away on the premises. The Skinners, therefore—this particular band happened to be of that persuasion—thought, or at all events acted, as though all that was left for them to do was to carry out their threat of hanging the farmer. After warming themselves well before the great log fire, they obtained a rope and compelled him to leave his comfortable hearth and walk before them into the cold winter night, with the pleasant prospect of being hanged from the first convenient tree. Silently they walked for a few moments, when the Skinners were much surprised by hearing their victim burst out laughing. They were curious as to the cause of his merriment, when he informed them that he was laughing because he thought it such a funny idea to suppose that hanging him would fill their pockets. This remark

set the robbers to thinking that there might be a little absurdity in what they were doing. After assuring themselves that he was not shamming in regard to having nothing, they let him return to his fireside, much to the satisfaction of himself and family. In the morning, he was not much astonished that his few remaining cattle were gone, but was, on the whole, glad to get off so easily.

A similar visit occurred at the same mansion a few years later, but before the close of the war. A friend of the family spent the night at the house on his way north, and upon parting the next day left thirty pounds in coin in charge of the daughter of the farmer, thinking perhaps that it would be less unsafe in her possession than on the highway. Be this as it may, everything was reasonably quiet around the place during the remainder of the day, but shortly after nightfall, a small party of Cowboys (for they were Cowboys this time) was observed approaching. The young woman immediately concealed the money about her person, and putting on a bold front prepared to receive them. Soon they entered, but instead of demanding valuables in a general way, they went immediately up to the girl and asked for the money that had been given her that morning. She, of course, denied that she had any, whereupon one of the marauders seized her and shook her so vio-

A Party
of Cow-
boys
Visit the
same
Home-
stead

The
Lefferts'
Mansion

lently that the bag of money fell upon the floor; the man instantly let go of her, picked up the gold and departed, followed by his companions. It was never known how they became acquainted with the fact that the money was in the house, but it was always suspected that one or more of the band must have been looking in the window when the young woman received it.

It becomes unavoidable, in writing of the Revolutionary occurrences of this locality, to change the scenes constantly, as there was no connected campaign or regular army in the vicinity after Howe drove the Federalists from Chatterton Heights. There was only a series of events entirely independent of each other. Somewhat nearer Kingsbridge than the homestead visited by the Skinners and the Cowboys, stood the Lefferts' mansion, which, unlike the other, was deserted by its proprietor, who, probably being a loyalist, had fled to the city. At all events he wrote a very queerly worded petition to Congress from New York City, which ran somewhat as follows:

"To the Continental Congress &c.

"MOST RESPECTED SIRs :

"Will your Honorable Body grant a pass for my two children to leave my mansion in Westchester County, and proceed to meet me in New York City. The house above referred to is, or of late was, occupied by thirty men in the Colonial service, who have eaten all the horned cattle, sheep and pigs, and driven nigh unto death all the horses;

and I now fear for my children confined in the house; and I would therefore humbly beseech your Honorable Body to grant a pass for the said children and such servants as may be deemed necessary to their safety in the present unsettled condition of the country. With the Greatest Respect Your Most Obedient and Humble Servant,

"DIRCK LEFFERTS."

Now, in reading this, the question that one naturally asks is, did he fear the children were to be eaten, or driven to death?

Again we change the scene. It was the dead of winter, and the snow lay thick upon the ground, when General Parsons collected a force of American troopers for a foraging expedition into Morrisania. The party of a hundred or more, desiring to be as silent as possible, to avoid a conflict with the Royal Refugees under Colonel De Lancey, were all put into sleighs and driven rapidly through Morrisania Manor towards Kingsbridge. No merry jingle of bells in this sleighing party; no laugh, no sound save the grim click of a musket's lock, or the rattle of the officers' side arms. On and on they sped over the silent, yielding snow, until their goal was almost reached, when suddenly an order rang out loud and clear upon the frosty air of midnight, and on all sides, like spectres from their graves, appeared armed and mounted men. Undismayed for a time, the Americans defended their sleighs with courage, almost with desperation, but the Light Horse were too nu-

Fate of a
Foraging
Expedi-
tion

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The Banquet at the Graham Mansion	merous for them, and ere long they were cut to pieces or captured. Before the retreat of the Americans northward the Westchester Church was used by General Heath as a hospital, and he quartered a number of his cavalry in the rectory, while the unfortunate rector, being a Royalist, was compelled to hide in a neighbor's stable. The Wilkins family did much to protect the English clergy during the war. Being strong Tories they threw open their house, and even had a secret closet in the chimney, where several were hidden safely when searched for by the Colonial troops. The Graham house was burned by accident during a magnificent banquet, given by Colonel Fowler, of the British army, who was using it as his temporary headquarters. The table had been covered with flowers and beautifully decorated with cut-glass and silver, and the guests, many of whom were ladies, were strolling about the grounds in the balmy summer evening, when a servant suddenly rushed from the house and informed the Colonel that the building was burning. That officer, not in the least discomposed, calmly ordered the tables brought out on the lawn, and seated the company, who watched the conflagration while enjoying their repast. The cool and gallant Colonel was unfortunately killed in a skirmish, very soon after this event.

The skirmishes between the Light Horse of the two armies were entirely too numerous and too barren of permanent result to chronicle in their entirety. One or two more, however, to show the general character of these expeditions may not be out of place.

Colonel Burr, afterwards so famous, or, rather, infamous, as the slayer of Hamilton, destroyed Colonel De Lancey's blockhouse, after a slight skirmish. The Colonel secretly approached the building in the night with quite a large number of men, threw a hand-grenade into the building, setting it on fire and killing a number of men. Most of the rest were captured while attempting to escape.

At the time of Washington's retreat before White Plains, a series of forts and earthworks were erected from the East River to the Hudson across Morrisania and the lower part of the present city of Yonkers. After their desertion by the Continentals, these works were often utilized by both parties in their expeditions against each other, and held for longer or shorter periods of time as might be advisable. General Heath, of the American forces, often occupied them, as did Lincoln and many another Continental commander, and on the British side, Simcoe, Tarleton, and Colonel James De Lancey made favorite resorts of them.

Skirmishes
between
the Two
Armies

Skirmishes
between
the Two
Armies

At one time the American forces, in considerable strength, advanced to Kingsbridge and took up their position for some time behind newly made earthworks. The sentries annoyed each other by continual firing, though it was against the orders of both armies by an agreement between their officers. As time passed, however, the men were better controlled on both sides, and became more accustomed to each other's presence, until finally the British put a raw Scotch recruit on guard, who immediately discharged his gun at the American sentry across the stream, who as quickly replied, and wounded an officer who happened to be standing near. This brought out the guard and its commander, who called across the river, "I thought we had agreed not to have any more of that business." The Continental replied, "Your man began it." "What! this Scotchman? he shall be punished": and in future there was no more firing. In fact the sentries became so amicable after a while that they would talk together, and even exchange pipes, tobacco, etc., by tying them to stones and throwing them across the creek.

Out of the British works at Kingsbridge often rode Colonel Simcoe and Colonel Tarleton on expeditions against the "Rebels." Sometimes success attended their efforts, and at others they were fruitless. On at least one

of these occasions they were accompanied by Prince William Henry (Duke of Clarence), afterwards William IV. of England (1782). He was then a junior officer in the navy. Just above Manhattan Island, on the Albany Pike, stood the "Old French Inn," kept by Gainos, who served many distinguished people in his day, as they travelled northward in the old mail coach. When the war broke out and the American army was in that vicinity, many of the officers frequented the tavern, and even the commander (who was very fond of French cooking) often dined there, and is said to have become quite fond of the dishes of Gainos. At all events, when the Continentals retired northward, the poor Frenchman thought the British would maltreat him for having fed the rebels, and he, therefore, left his inn in charge of some neighbors, and fled with Washington's army.

The first night after the landlord's departure the house was attacked by a party of Cow-boys, who evidently thought the place practically deserted. In this supposition it happened that they were mistaken, for a number of the country people had collected in the tavern as was their wont, in spite of the absence of the proprietor, to gossip over the exciting condition of affairs. When they saw the band of robbers they determined to defend the place, and as few people went out at night in those

The "Old
French
Inn"

434	The "Neutral Ground"
The "Old French Inn"	troubled times unarmed, they were all in possession of weapons of some kind. Therefore when the marauders demanded admittance to the house, they were much surprised to be received by a shower of bullets, and soon came to the conclusion that the wisest thing for them to do was to leave the vicinity as rapidly as possible. So the Cowboys picked up one of their number who had been hit, and proceeded through the meadows, woods, and orchards, for they seldom followed the roads, towards Kingsbridge. They had not gone far when they discovered that their wounded companion was dying from the effects of his injuries. This discovery made a halt necessary; they laid the poor fellow down on a grassy bank in an old orchard, and seated themselves, waiting for him to breathe his last. They were not delayed long, for after a few gasps his blood-stained soul departed. Small ceremony sufficed for the poor fellow's funeral; the man who happened to be nearest simply said: "It's all over with him; let's be moving, or more of us may get the same pill." Then they picked up the body again, as it might serve to track them to their fastness should they leave it where it lay, and carried it to a well that happened to be under one of the trees; there they let the poor wretch fall into the water, and he was soon

lost to sight, after which they proceeded on their way.

The next day some of the residents came for water and were horrified to find the liquid stained with blood, and to this day the spot is called the bloody well. Many are the tales that are told of supernatural sights and sounds that emanate from the locality. As to the truth of the ghostly part of the occurrences, we are unable to say, but certain it is that even as recently as our own times, the mouldering remains of a man were taken from the well. Let us hope that the removal and decent interment of the body also quieted the restless soul.

Once more the scene changes, not much as to locality, but radically as to events. The brave but unfortunate Stockbridge Indians had espoused the cause of the Colonies, and came down through Yonkers nearly to Kingsbridge on an expedition against Simcoe's forces. That officer having got wind of the enemy's approach, at once prepared to give them a warm reception. Selecting a well-wooded portion of the road he concealed most of his troops on both sides of it ; then he sent a small party of cavalry northward to attract the attention of the Indians. They had not far to go ; for soon they descried them silently advancing in single file as is the wont of these sons of the forest ; but long before

The
Bloody
Well

The
Defeat
of the
Stocks
bridge
Indians

the troopers had discovered their swarthy foes the sharp eyes of the Indians had seen the horsemen and prepared for action. As was planned, the British horse only skirmished lightly and then fell back, the Indians following them in hot pursuit, until they were within the ambush, where over forty, out of a total of sixty, were killed or captured. When the old chief saw the situation he shouted: "Save yourselves, my children; my time has come and I am ready," and he fell dead with a bullet in his heart. This leader was quite a well-known man for one of his race, having visited England and been presented at court. He could read and write fluently and had a very good idea of history.

To show what a crude idea the British ministry had of the topography of this country, it may not be out of way here to insert an order received by Lord Admiral Howe :

"As the County of Westchester is in a very unsettled condition, and our troops are much harrassed by the 'Rebels,' whenever in that vicinity, you will send a couple of frigates up the Bronx River, to protect our forces and fire into the enemy whenever seen."

Now as this stream has an average breadth of about seventy-five feet and a depth in some places of not more than eighteen inches, it might have troubled his lordship to obey this command. Did they confuse this river with the Hudson?

In 1778, Colonel Gist of the Continental army occupied quarters near the Babcock mansion, where then resided Mrs. Babcock, the handsome widow of the Rev. Luke Babcock, and it was whispered that the gallant Colonel had selected this locality for his command, which was much nearer the enemy's line than was at all safe or advisable for so small a force, that he might pay his addresses to this fair widow. Be that as it may, Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe got wind of his whereabouts in some way, and resolved upon the capture of the entire command. He therefore sent out his forces at night to surround the encampment of Gist. His plan apparently succeeded perfectly; the Americans were not in any way disturbed until the enemy supposed they had entirely surrounded their intended victims. The Colonel himself was oblivious of all outside events, for never had the beautiful widow been more engaging, and never had he remained at her house so late. But all evenings however enchanting, must come to an end, and this one was no exception; so finally he bade his fair friend adieu and started for his camp. Just as he was departing reluctantly, looking back as he went to see her waving a final farewell with her handkerchief, he heard a shot quickly followed by a scattering volley. Forgetting instantly his romance, he rushed rapidly to where his

The
Encounter
between
Colonel
Gist
and the
Royalists

The
Encounter
between
Colonel
Gist
and the
Royalists

men were quartered ; there he found everything in the direst confusion. Barring his weakness for the widow, the Colonel was a good soldier and soon restored a semblance of order even in the face of the enemy. He took in the situation at a glance and resolved to fight his way to the main army northward. It is very doubtful if he would have been able to do this, however, had it not been for the fact that one of the enemy's commands had lost its way and thereby left a passage open for him, which he was not slow to use. He therefore reached his friends, not indeed without fighting, but with the loss of only about one third of his command. How his affairs prospered with the widow after this interruption we know not ; but let us hope that if he again ventured in that quarter, he did not involve his entire command in this sort of a conquest.

When the Skinners and the Cowboys were struggling for the sovereignty of the "Neutral Ground," and shortly after one of the scions of one of our old county families had been shot down while standing under a walnut tree^e near the door of his mansion by one of these gentry^r for refusing to blacken his boots, the people found it necessary to bury all valuables which they chanced to possess to escape these marauders from both sides.

One day it was whispered abroad that a

rather stronger party of Skinners than usual was about to visit the district of lower Eastchester. Several of the people came together, unhung the bell of the "Old East Chester Church," filled it with money and other valuables and buried it. Among these individuals were two brothers named Wilson. One of these young men, Harry, was a drunken, worthless chap, who had caused the death of his beautiful and devoted wife by his brutality, while the other seems to have been a very respectable member of society. Some time after the visit of the before-mentioned party of Skinners, both brothers (who were not on good terms) by a strange coincidence resolved to dig up the bell and procure the treasure on the same night. Harry, whose wife had recently died, came to the spot first, with the necessary tools, and also a bottle of his never-failing companion, brandy. The night was dark and cold, and the winter wind sighed in the old apple-tree over his head as he struck the first blow upon the frozen ground with his pick. The work was severe as the ground was hard from frost, but with the aid of many a pull upon the black bottle, he soon had the satisfaction of hearing the pick ring upon the metal of the bell. After cleaning out the dirt a little and taking a look at the precious things within, he sat down to rest and finish the last of the contents of his beloved bottle.

The
Buried
Church
Bell

The
Buried
Church
Bell

He had hardly done this and sent the empty vessel crashing amongst the stones and *débris* of the excavation, when he thought he saw a light approaching. He took an instant to assure himself he was not mistaken, then put out his own lantern and stepped behind a tree to await his visitor. In a few moments he saw his brother, pick in hand, advance to the spot, and heard him exclaim: "What! somebody has been here before me, but they must have left hurriedly, for nothing is taken." Harry waited no longer, but stepping from behind the tree, informed his brother that his time had come, and suiting his action to his words, seized his unfortunate victim by the throat. For a time they struggled, but the first comer, made strong by drink and frenzy, soon conquered, and left his opponent dead upon the ground. The next morning a neighbor discovered the remains, but the murderer was never seen again. Strange to say, however, he only took from the bell just what belonged to him, leaving the rest as he had found it.

The remains of the murdered man were buried in the old churchyard from which the bell was taken, and a few days later his *fiancée*, who had died from the shock of the news, was laid by his side. The bell was soon replaced in the church tower, and rings out each Sunday morning, as it has done since the time of good Queen Anne. It is

said that upon every anniversary of this horrible event the bell tolls, and suppressed groans are heard in the time-honored tower.⁸

One evening an old Indian, the last of his race, sat at the door of his wigwam watching the fading rays of the chill October sun disappear from the western sky, when two rough-looking men and a dog crossed the farther end of the clearing. The chief, whose head the ashes of time had long since whitened, recognized the newcomers at once to be members of a band of Skinners, supposed some mischief might be brewing, and resolved to follow the miscreants. They led him across a brook and through the woods, until they came to a small hut where a third member of the band was making a fire. The Indian secreted himself in some bushes within hearing and awaited events. One of the men whom he had followed hailed the man by the fire and said:

"Did you get the girl, Paul?"

"Yes, she is in the hut."

"Did she tell where the old man's money was buried?"

"No."

"Then she must die. Bring her out."

The man called Paul disappeared within the hut, and soon returned leading a terrified but still beautiful young girl, whom the ruffians tied to a tree and then prepared to shoot.

An Old
Indian's
Rescue of
a Young
Girl

An Old
Indian's
Rescue of
a Young
Girl

"I will give you one more chance," said the man who appeared to be the leader. "Tell us where the money lies buried."

"I know of no money," was the faint, gentle answer.

"Then prepare to die. *One—two—*"

He raised his gun to fire at the word three, but before he could utter it the unerring aim of the Indian had sent a bullet through his heart, and before his companions could recover from their surprise the old chief rushed in with knife and tomahawk and despatched them both. He picked up the poor girl, who had fainted, and carried her to his wigwam, where she was soon revived. The poor old man, however, perished at the battle of White Plains while fighting gallantly in the Colonial army.⁸

But our tales are finished, and the "Neutral Ground" is neutral no longer. The great city has stretched out its long arms and encircled it in its grasp. The days of the Cowboy and the Skinner are over. The British soldier and his Hessian ally are seen no more. Clinton, Howe, Washington, and Lee, all sleep with their fathers, and the drum and the bugle of the Revolution are silent.

"Soldier rest, thy warfare o'er,
Sleep the sleep that knows no breaking;
Dream of battle-fields no more,
Days of danger, nights of waking."

NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. The name is taken from Jonas Broncks, one of the early proprietors of the district.
 2. The original owner of the property was Throgmorton. Throg's Neck is a corruption of Throgmorton's Neck.
 3. Thomas Pell was the first proprietor.
 4. The shot was fired by Lieutenant Paddock.
 5. We do not mean to assert that there was a thermometer as we understand it.
 6. Some thirty years ago this tree was cut down by the proprietor. Some of the wood has come into the possession of the writer, through a relative to whom it was given. It now forms a couple of book-cases.
 7. Some writers state that a Hessian officer committed this deed, but we think the Cowboy version is correct.
 8. The last two anecdotes were told to the writer by Mr. William L. Stone, the historian.
- R. A. BOLTON's *History of the County of Westchester*. New York, 1848.
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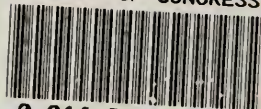
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